

Worker Education and Training Branch

Editor's note: This is the third in a series of articles describing the four extramural program branches at the NIEHS.

*What does training really mean? Firefighters from Rock Hill, South Carolina, used the expertise gained in several NIEHS grant-funded courses to rescue a victim who had fallen into a 20-foot-deep vertical sewer. The initial rescuer was equipped with proper protective gear and lowered into the space to find the victim drowning in the raw sewage. The rescuer established a patent airway and cervical-spinal stabilization and requested assistance from a second rescuer. Both rescuers then worked to package the patient for safe removal from the space. The result: good training had saved another life.**

The Worker Education and Training Branch (WETB) plans and administers grants, contracts, cooperative agreements, and interagency agreements to help organizations develop institutional competency to train hazardous waste workers and emergency responders. The WETB staff has worked to develop specific initiatives to support the programmatic functions of the branch.

The WETB is responsible for the Worker Education and Training Program (WETP), a training grants program established under the Superfund Amendments and Reauthorization Act of 1986. The mission of the WETP is to support the development of a network of nonprofit organizations that are committed to protecting workers and their communities by creating and delivering high-quality, peer-reviewed safety and health curricula to train hazardous waste workers and emergency responders.

Over the past 16 years, the WETP supported its core program, the Hazardous Waste Worker Training Program, by providing over a million workers in all regions of the country with health and safety training. Since 1986, the scope of the program expanded to include the following grant activities:

- the Department of Energy (DOE) Nuclear Training Program—awardees trained nearly 175,000 environmental response and cleanup workers at the DOE Nuclear Weapons Complex;
- the Minority Worker Training Program—awardees successfully trained more than 2,600 young minority adults in worker health and safety for construction and environmental cleanup;
- the Brownfields Minority Worker Training Program—awardees trained nearly 2,000 workers in 15 brownfields communities, in the process positively changing the lives of the trainees and their families in many different ways; and
- the Small Business Innovation Research E-Learning Program—awardees created e-learning technology that supports high-quality health and safety training for hazardous waste workers and emergency responders.

In addition to these activities, since 11 September 2001 the WETP has also trained workers in cleaning up environmental problems stemming from the World Trade Center attacks, as well as potential bioterrorism and use of weapons of mass destruction.



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For more information about the WETP | <http://www.niehs.nih.gov/wetp/home.htm>

*Alan Veasey, director of workplace safety training, University of Alabama at Birmingham, in NIEHS Progress Report.